

HISTORY OF UNIVERSITIES SEMINAR | 4 MAY 2022

## **THE TWISTED ROOTS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES**

*Christi M. Smith, Washington University in St. Louis, United States*

In recent years, campuses across the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States have been important sites for protest on issues such as decolonizing education, addressing gender-based violence, reducing student loan debt, and supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. Higher education enrollment has increased dramatically over the past twenty years, and yet this growth has also reflected entrenched patterns of racial, gender, and economic segregation. Yet, often issues of categorical discrimination are examined independently. To understand the interdependence of these, I draw on historical data to illuminate the ways in which gender, race and ethnicity, and economic status, were co-constituted during the formative years in the construction of the organizational field of higher education. This analysis reveals the production of durable interdependence of meritocracy and categorical inequality as tightly linked to liberal political regimes.

### **History of Universities Seminar**

Convened by Miles Taylor (Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany), Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang (Academia Sinica, Taiwan), Heike Jöns (Loughborough University, United Kingdom) and Tamson Pietsch (University of Technology Sydney, Australia). Hosted by the Humboldt University of Berlin on Zoom: <https://www.histgeog-uni.net/history-of-universities-seminar/>.